

August 2, 1978.

Dear Dr. . . ,

In your question you say that you were wondering whether beings in other than the human plane accumulate kamma, and whether they perhaps only receive results.

As long as we are in the cycle of samsara, no matter in what plane, we accumulate kamma. So long as avijjā, ignorance, has not been eradicated there is the accumulation of kamma which causes re-birth and the receiving of pleasant and unpleasant results in the course of life.

We read that devas attain enlightenment; for example, when the Buddha taught Rahula on the day Rahula became an arahat. How could the devas attain, unless they cultivated paññā and were mindful while listening to the Buddha? And that is kusala kamma. Ariyan saints who are not arahats can be reborn in other planes, continue developing sātipaṭṭhāna (kusala kamma) and attain final liberation.

But also petas, ghosts, can accumulate kusala kamma when they rejoice in good deeds of humans (anumodhana dāna). Thus, also in other planes ^(except asañña satta, no nāma) there is the accumulation of kamma going on.

You write: There is not always sati, and then right effort is the answer. The word 'effort' is misleading, we keep on thinking of a self who has right effort, even though we know in theory that virīya is a cetasika, not self. We read in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta that the monk is mindful of the body: 'kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī (ardently) sampajāno (with paññā) satimā (with sati)', and this is repeated for feeling, citta, dhamma. Very powerful and a good reminder, 'these' repetitions of ātāpī, sampajāno, satimā. In the Buddha's time the other religions also used ātāpī and took it for self, they practised asceticism. Ātāpī we can translate as: with devotion, with courage, with patience. Why mindful with devotion? We have taken our refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha. The Commentary explains that in taking one's refuge in something, one considers that as the highest value. Satipaṭṭhāna is of the highest value, since in this way akusala can be eradicated. That is ātāpī, but always in connection with sampajāno, satimā. Not first effort (self) and then later arising of sati. There is right effort at the very moment of right mindfulness. Not before.

We are bound to take sati for self, we are bound to confuse feelings. When pleasant feeling about sati arises we are not sure whether it is feeling with lobha or kusala feeling. More often feeling is akusala for sure. We can only know feeling as it is if we have courage, devotion, ardour: '...vedanāsu vedanānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā...'

You are right that there is no vipassanā^{yet} if one has not realised the arising and falling away of dhammas: samudayavayadhammā-nupassī. What exactly falls away right now, is it seeing or visible object, hearing or sound? Do we know the difference yet between nāma and rūpa? Sammāsankappō, right thought, does have a function, it touches the right object, either a nāma or a rūpa; but only one dhamma at a time can be known. Yes, this is difficult for all of us. We take seeing and visible object together, as a whole. It takes courage to realise what we do not know yet. But there can be a beginning of sati, many years may be needed before the difference can be known between nāma and rūpa. So long as 'we' do not know the difference (it is actually not we but paññā) everything is vague, there is more thinking about nāma and rūpa than sati. But we need courage to continue in spite of all our ignorance: ātāpī. That is the true asceticism, harder than special practices such as sitting.

I am learning by heart the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta in Pali so that I can join the Singhalese on Poya day when I am in Sri Lanka in April. And the Pali is so direct, and it helps as a good reminder for sati. I learnt 'Iti pi so Bhagavā...'. The Singhalese inspired me.

Kind regards,

Nina